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INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA IMMEDIATE 7209
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RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ OCT 8292
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA IMMEDIATE 4381
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID IMMEDIATE 9447
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO IMMEDIATE 0347
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RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO IMMEDIATE 5045
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/12/2016
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VE
SUBJECT: GOC PEACE COMMISSIONER SKEPTICAL OF FARC AND ELN
COMMITMENT TO PEACE PROCESSES

REF: BOGOTA 09029

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: GOC Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo told the Ambassador October 9 he is skeptical the ELN will commit either publicly or privately to a specific cease-fire date at the October 20-25 negotiating round in Havana. If the ELN does not do so, the GOC may break off talks. He also believes the FARC is not serious about reaching agreement on a humanitarian accord, but said it is politically important that the GOC make a &good faith8 effort to negotiate with the group. Restrepo voiced concern that the FARC is doing a better job than the GOC in managing the public relations aspects of the humanitarian accord, and said the GOC will soon set up a communications team to convey its message more effectively. End Summary

ELN

12. (C) Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo told the Ambassador that despite the ELN-GOC agreement to hold a fourth round of talks in Havana October 20-25, he is concerned the ELN has not yet decided to suspend military action in exchange for political space. He fears the group wants to use the peace process to strengthen its links to sympathetic political parties and civil society groups while rebuilding its military capacity. The GOC will not accept this, and will push in Havana for a public ELN commitment to work on the modalities of a cease-fire that would start within three to four months (January or February of 2007). If a public announcement of a cease-fire date were not acceptable to the ELN, the GOC would accept a private commitment or a working agreement. Without any of these, Restrepo said, the GOC may break off talks and send ELN spokesman Francisco Galan back to jail.

13. (C) Restrepo said Venezuela was helpful in pushing the ELN to agree on a meaningful agenda (reftel) for the Havana meeting, but stressed the GOC harbors no illusions about Venezuela's role. GOV policy toward Colombia reflects

Venezuela,s complicated internal politics, in which the ELN is also involved. Still, the GOV has real leverage over the ELN, which sees Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez as its leader and role model. In Caracas, Venezuelan Ambassador-designate to Colombia Pavel Rondon, who Restrepo called a &moderate,8 had pushed the ELN to keep the talks on track. Restrepo concluded it is better to have the GOV involved in the process rather than outside causing problems. The GOC views the Cubans in the same way. In contrast, Restrepo criticized the Norwegian and Swiss facilitators for being neutral players who do not press the ELN to make concessions.

FARC

¶4. (C) Restrepo doubts the FARC is serious about a deal. It is trying to use the prospect of a humanitarian accord and broader peace talks to regain political space and to win a respite from GOC military pressure (which will not happen). Buoyed by the consolidation of President Chavez, regime in Caracas and a possible Rafael Correa victory in Ecuador, the FARC believes the regional political climate is moving in its favor. If it can outlast Uribe,s tenure, the FARC thinks it will be able to negotiate with the next Colombian president from a position of strength.

¶5. (C) Still, Restrepo said it is important politically that the GOC make a &good faith8 effort to negotiate with the FARC. Hence, the GOC offer that Restrepo meet with FARC negotiators to discuss the conditions of an &encounter zone8 where talks on a humanitarian accord could occur. He reiterated that GOC outreach to the FARC is complicated by the lack of reliable interlocutors. The Catholic Church has

no contact with the FARC Secretariat, and it is unclear to what extent Carlos Lozano and Alvaro Leyva speak for the group. The FARC has had no communications with the three accompanying countries (Spain, France and Switzerland), but Raul Reyes reportedly will soon contact the three. He said the GOC has a direct channel, which gives them insight into FARC thinking and vice-versa, but clarified that this is not a negotiating channel.

¶6. (C) Restrepo said the GOC must do a better job managing the public relations aspects of possible negotiations. The FARC is exploiting the media*and especially Leyva*to pressure the GOC to meet its demand that the GOC demilitarize two municipalities for talks. Restrepo said President Uribe is educating the Colombian public on the issues surrounding a humanitarian accord. He cited Uribe,s October 9 public declaration that no FARC terrorists released as part of a deal would be allowed to return to crime and that the European proposal from last December would be a useful starting point for talks. (Note: The European proposal calls for a smaller demilitarized area and would not allow the Colombian military or armed FARC members in the area.) Still, Restrepo said the GOC cannot continue to use Uribe as its spokesman. It needs to exercise greater discipline in its message and public comments. He said the GOC plans to set up a communications team that will reach out to key opinion-makers to highlight the FARC,s cynical manipulation of the hostages and their families.

WOOD